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Volume 32 | Number 4

Article 6

1952

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Recommended Citation

Goul, Jean (1952) "Before You Snap It...," *The Iowa Homemaker*: Vol. 32 : No. 4 , Article 6.

Available at: <http://lib.dr.iastate.edu/homemaker/vol32/iss4/6>

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Before You Snap it...

by Jean Goul

Technical Journalism Junior

YOU'VE HEARD people say, "Your college days are the best days of your life." Your favorite memories will be that fall picnic at the Ledges, the big toboggan party of your sophomore year or the day you got pinned. The best way to record these memories is with a camera. Experimenting with a camera and learning how to use it skillfully can be fun. Here are some hints for better pictures to help those of you who have inexpensive cameras without complex mechanisms.

Read the instruction manual

First of all, read the booklet that came with your camera. This manual tells you how to load film, attach a flash-holder, use the view finder—all the mechanical details of camera operation.

After studying your camera manual, practice handling the camera. Study subjects through the view finder from various distances and angles. This helps you recognize a good subject when you see it. Practice clicking the shutter so that you don't joggle the whole camera. A shaky camera gives you shaky pictures. Take a look at some of the common camera mistakes in pictures and make a point of avoiding them. A tilted picture is the result of not observing carefully through the view finder. Keep your eye on the subject through the view finder until after the shutter clicks.

A common mistake made by the beginner is to obscure the lens with the camera neckstrap or your finger. Learn to handle your camera so your fingers or the strap don't get in front of the lens.

Always remember to choose a suitable background. Action may be lost against a tree or shrubbery. Always look beyond the subject before you shoot. If the background is bad, change your camera position or move the subject.

Underexposure and overexposure are two common mistakes. Underexposure results from taking a snapshot in the shade giving poor details and not enough light. If you want to get a picture in the shade use a flash attachment. Overexposure results from too long an exposure taken in bright sunlight. The details are chalky and unclear. This happens if you make a time exposure or use ultra films in the bright light.

Another error which gives a blurry picture is bringing the camera too near the subject. The picture will be out of focus and blurry. If you wish to take a close-up, use a portrait attachment. A soiled lens also gives a picture which is blurry and indefinite. You can buy lens tissue and lens cleaner to clean the lens.

When loading your camera, don't unnecessarily expose film to any kind of light. There is no light which is safe. Handle film by the edges as the coated side is easily damaged by fingers.

Every picture should have one object or idea as a center of interest. Avoid two ideas of equal importance. When taking a picture of a landmark, have the person facing or looking at the object so the interest is centered on the landmark. If the person is facing the camera, the person will compete with the landmark as the center of interest.

Use mechanisms correctly

Two common mechanisms on the less complex camera are the exposure meter and the range finder. The exposure meter measures the amount of light given to the picture. It is very simple to operate and usually done by pointing a small movable arrow to the amount of time you wish. Many cameras have the phrases "marine and beach scenes," "ordinary landscapes," "near-by landscapes" or "shaded scenes." Point the arrow toward the type of picture you are taking and the time exposure is set.

The range finder measures the distance between the camera and the object. It is essential for a satisfactory picture to have these set correctly. Remember, it's just as easy to take a good picture as a poor one and much more satisfying.

